

Testimony // CUNY Board of Trustees Meeting // October 16, 2023

Joseph Entin, Professor of English and American Studies, Brooklyn College

My name is Joseph Entin and I have been professing English and American Studies at Brooklyn College for 21 years. When I took my job at Brooklyn, I turned down an offer from a Research-1 institution because of my commitment to CUNY's mission to educate the "whole people" of New York City. It is a commitment I share with thousands of CUNY faculty and staff. I'm here today to tell you about a student, Abdoulaye, who might stand in for so many others I have worked with over the years. Abdoulaye is in his late twenties and has a young daughter. He's a transfer student from Kingsborough Community College, an English major at Brooklyn College, and a poet who has also taken three acting workshops, as well as courses in philosophy, politics, Caribbean society, Children's studies, and more. I met Abdoulaye when he took a class with me in the Spring of 2022; he was relatively quiet in class, but intensely curious: his contributions to discussion were often not comments, but *questions*. Abdoulaye wants to probe deeply, to get to the root of things, to understand new issues and ideas. A year later, Abdoulaye enrolled in a Mellon Foundation-funded research program for transfer students that I co-direct and set out to explore depictions of Haiti in U.S. literature. We met individually every week or so as Abdoulaye read several novels and also critical writing by the late, acclaimed University of Chicago Anthropologist Michel Rolph-Trouillot, himself a Brooklyn College alum. Abdoulaye wrote an astonishing paper on a 1934 novel by Brooklyn writer Guy Endore called *Babouk*, about slavery on Saint-Domingue and the Haitian revolution. Reflecting on this historical novel, Abdoulaye wrote: "the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us . . . [that] history is literally *present* in all that we do. . . And, it is with great difficulty that one begins to realize this and to assess the history which has placed one where one is and formed one's point of view."

Abdoulaye is exceptional, but not in my experience unusual; he is one of countless CUNY students making the most of their educations in the face of poverty and alongside family responsibilities, long commutes, and paid and unpaid work of all kinds. CUNY students are not only people who need good jobs; they are artists, parents, citizens, *thinkers of the highest order*. They deserve nothing less than the best: small classes, campus Wi-Fi that works, clean classrooms without peeling paint and leaking ceilings, libraries with working elevators, staff and faculty—especially adjuncts—who are well compensated and have time to nurture students' incredible, inquisitive minds. For the sake of our students and their potential and manifest brilliance, I urge you to find or fight for the funding to make CUNY the jewel it could be. I look forward to your response.